DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 351 UD 028 841

AUTHOR Bogotch, Ira E.; And Others
TITLE Linking School Level Innovations with an Urban School District's Central Office.
PUB DATE Apr 92
NOTE 42p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Organization; Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Institutional Environment; Institutional Role; *Instructional Innovation; Principals; *School Administration; School Districts; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

A study was done of the relationship between school district central offices and school-based innovations in a large urban school district. The study looked specifically at the work relationships among central office personnel and their behaviors and attitudes toward school-based innovations. Data were collected through a survey administered to 30 principals and 30 central office personnel. In addition, all central office personnel were interviewed about their roles, responsibilities, and working relationships. Analysis of the data found little evidence either structurally or behaviorally, that the school system had a clear understanding of what innovation is, the complexity of implementation, or its role in improving the delivery of student services. Further, there was little commitment to innovation and risk-taking, to rewards, and to use of research and development. Central office encouragement of innovations was limited to informal relationships among individuals, and in some instances, administrators choose which schools were to receive innovative programs funded by a grant. In other instances, schools developed their own responses to problems with or without the knowledge, support, or encouragement of the central office. Suggestions for restructuring based on five research questions are included. (Contains 5 tables; 40 references.) (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED349351

Linking School Level Innovations With An Urban School District's Central Office

by

Ira E. Bogotch
University of New Orleans

Cormell R. Brooks
University of New Orleans

Brian A. Riedlinger
New Orleans Public Schools

Barbara C. MacPhee
New Orleans Public Schools

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, April 21, 1992.

UD 028841

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

I. Bogotch
University of New Orleans

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between school district central offices and school-based innovations. It looks specifically at the work relationships among central office personnel in a large urban district and their behaviors and attitudes towards school-based innovations. Principals (N=30) and central office personnel (N=30) were surveyed about school-based innovations; in addition, all central office personnel were interviewed about their roles, responsibilities, and working relationships. Five research questions were asked: what is meant by educational innovations? what are the sources of educational innovations? what is the structural support for innovation provided by central office personnel? what is the behavioral support of innovation provided by central office personnel? what are the central office attitudes towards innovation? Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer these questions and a proposed restructuring model is offered highlighting deficiencies found in this urban central office. The areas recommended for restructuring are cabinet-level leadership, expertise of personnel, increasing external demand for innovations, and increasing innovation timelines.

School district central offices have not been the focus of many school restructuring or educational innovation studies. When central offices are discussed, it is usually as background for debating broad organizational concepts such as centralization versus decentralization or bureaucratic structures versus emergent patterns (Pajak, 1992). Specific references to central office behaviors derive more often from personal and anecdotal experiences, ideological stances (Johnston, 1985), or past routines (Gittell & Hollander, 1968) than from research. In short, much of what is known about central offices is based on speculations (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 184) or comes from "pieced together" data about superintendents and their boards at the top end with data about principals at the bottom end (Wimpelberg, 1987). Neither provides very much information about what goes on **in-between** the superintendent and principal levels.

Historical descriptions relating the role and functions of central offices have been published by Goodlad (1978), Rowan (1982), and Meyer (1983). Each of these independent investigations confirmed that business operations and bureaucratic centralization dominate the instructional support functions of central offices. Ever since the publication of 110 Livingston Street (Rodgers, 1969), many consider bureaucracy and central offices as synonymous terms. Assuming that people can and do make a difference within organizations, the equation of central office with a faceless bureaucracy tends to hide the intra- and interorganizational relationships within the central office and between central offices and schools. The starting

point for this investigation is an analysis of the interrelationships between schools and central office personnel and central office behaviors which foster school-based innovations.

As a result of school-based reforms, state waivers granted to districts and schools, demand for fiscal accountability, or from shrinking resources that necessitate reduction in central office functions, changes within school district central offices are already occurring. The question is not whether central offices need to restructure, but to what extent and how they will restructure.

A Crossroads: Central Offices and School-based Innovations

Successful implementation of school-based innovations invariably affects the structure of central administrative offices. "Being ready for school-based improvement requires a reorientation in the way we think and operate in our schools and at the district level" (Caldwell & Wood, 1988, p. 50). Value reorientation requires the deepest and most significant commitment to change (Tye & Novotney, 1975). If school-based innovations are at the heart of the current restructuring movement, then restructured central offices must occur. If, on the other hand, the primary objectives are to minimize the effects of downsizing or to acquire short term funds through external sources, then it is unlikely that this round of structural changes will be any more successful than those advanced during previous reform eras.

Emerging from the research on school-based management reforms is a profile of what central administrations ought to look like. They are characterized by lean staffs, support for innovations, open lines of communication, and continuous opportunities for professional growth of teachers and principals (David, 1989; Sickler, 1988; Casner-Lotto, 1988). In practically every instance, the optimum leadership behaviors emanate from a strong superintendent who sends a clear message that those in the schools, principals and teachers, are responsible for achieving success and will be rewarded for practices which involve risk-taking on behalf of student success. All of these characteristics, however, are based on extrapolations from reform-oriented districts and school-level data, rather than on research designs which study the role and functions of central administrative personnel with respect to school-based innovations. Thus, it is very likely that studies have tended to substitute written school district goals and policy as evidence of its commitment towards school-based innovations instead of examining actual practices, behaviors, and interactions at the central office level.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that the "pieced together" descriptions of central office support for school-based reforms are more illusory than real (Taylor & Bogotch, 1992). It is not sufficient for a central office to support school-based efforts rhetorically without themselves participating in similar restructuring efforts. Too often, proposed reforms which are

embraced by central offices are not followed up with an implementation plan for the kinds of school-level training which will be needed (Herman, 1990; Van Meter, 1991).

Nevertheless, there are a growing number of case study accounts which indicate that the relationship among central office policies and structure and school-based innovations is supported in practice. In Pittsburg schools, for example, Wallace, LeMahieu and Bickel (1990) document that the superintendent acted as the initiator of a study to determine how to improve instruction and then facilitated the follow-up staff development. Likewise, staff development has been the focus of central office efforts in Los Angeles (DeVries & Colbert, 1990), Lincoln (Dillion-Peterson, 1990), and to a lesser extent in the decentralized strategies of Dade County (Dreyfuss, Cistone, & DeVita, 1992). While each of these examples emphasizes staff development aimed primarily at school personnel, there seems to be a new awareness of the need for staff development at the central office level as well (Pajak, 1992).

Two organizational characteristics seem to greatly enhance innovation today: a central office that exhibits a clear philosophy that student success is important and rewards that success (Coyle & Wythcher, 1992), and support for innovation from the top down as well as from the bottom up (Wimpelberg, 1987). Pajak and Glick (1989) discovered that superintendents and central office supervisors were key figures in stimulating instructional improvement. While principals and teachers are

more likely to be change agents in bringing about a programmatic innovation, an explicit central office attitude supporting change is essential. Coyle and Wythcher (1992) found that "system-level administrators who wish to promote or maintain effective school programs must examine the ideology of the school system" (p. 393). If the spoken or unspoken value is system maintenance, innovation will rarely occur.

Innovations as a Central Organizing Concept

Many of the current findings regarding administrative support and system-wide innovation are not at all new. In Innovation and Education, Miles compiled and analyzed three decades of research on educational innovation which are still relevant in today's educational environment. The major difference across the decades is not the knowledge utilization of innovators, but rather the political climate and external demands for educational innovation.

The concept of innovation is not just a matter of structural rearrangements, but rather a new focus on social institutions, management, and people. It is fundamentally a demand-driven concept affecting social and economic relationships, and not merely a technical advance (Drucker, 1985). Quoting Miles (1964), innovation is "always operant in relation to a given social system" (p. 14. author's emphasis). Because of the social complexity, it is not always very clear what is meant by the term innovation. In their seminal study of six urban districts, Gittell and Hollander (1968) defined innovation as a valid output

measure of the "successful introduction to an applied situation of means or ends that are new to that situation" (p. 3). They found that the nature of power and participation [i.e., social relationships] were directly related to three broad categories of innovations: programmatic innovation, administrative reorganization, and school reorganization. Their study placed innovations at the center of education. Although innovation is "always present in some degree in all school systems," (p. 3) its meaning and significance may be minimal. Therefore, the authors argued for qualitative criteria to assess innovations. It is not the number of innovations which count (Timar & Kirp, 1988), rather it is the effect innovation has on improving schools.

The loosely coupled nature of educational organizations (Weick, 1976) implies that innovations involve multiple perspectives: system-wide innovations, school unit innovations, and demand-driven innovations. Loosely coupled systems permit school units to attempt innovations, including the possibility of failure, without threatening the system as a whole. Loose coupling, however, also makes coordinating support for isolated innovative efforts more difficult than in a tightly coupled, bureaucratic organization. There is evidence that the limited impact of school unit innovation points to the need for more system-wide focus and comprehensive support (Mort, 1964; Wimpelberg, 1988). That is, isolated school unit innovations by themselves have been unable to have any significant impact on the district system as a whole. The implication worth testing is

that when central offices play an active leadership role in supporting innovations, are school level innovations more successful?

Loosely coupled relationships also raise the possibility for expanding the demand side for innovations. The vertical perspective of top down and bottom up collaboration may be intersected with a broader, horizontal dimension of new participants: parents, students, community members, and local businesses. When people feel "cared about," they tend to be more involved, committed, and innovative (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Eisenberger et al., 1990). By opening the channels of communication to external participants, the system is introduced to innovative ideas (Kouzes & Posner, 1987), thus, increasing the demand for innovations.

Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

The literature is replete with depictions of central offices as (a) closed, centralized, bureaucratic structures devised to protect the values fostered by homogeneous professional educators (Gittell, 1967), and (b) politicized systems characterized by manipulation and conflict (Peterson, 1976). As such, "highly centralized systems are easily clogged with trivia. The result is inertia, pessimism, inefficiency, and long delays for decisions of any kind on the smallest of matters (NASSP, 1989, p. 3). Whatever determination may exist on the part of central offices to establish direct links to schools, the structural tenets of standardization, centralization, mandated policies and

programs, and collective bargaining all tend to contradict school-based innovations. The result is what Cistone and Iannoconne (1980) have called "structural schizophrenia" (p. 418).

The discussion of innovations as an organizing concept for change, however, suggests that restructuring district central offices has strong theoretical support in terms of fostering (a) educational outcomes (Gittell & Hollander, 1968) (b) organizational effectiveness (Drucker, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 1987), and (c) educational change (Tye & Novotney, 1975; Fullan, 1982). The current wave of school-based management reform is today's opportunity to restructure central offices into Goodlad's futuristic third era of school leadership (1978). In order to provide the empirical evidence needed to support school system change, five research questions were posed:

1. What is the definition of educational program innovation?
2. What are the sources of innovation?
3. What is the structural support for innovation provided by Central Office personnel?
4. What is the behavioral support of innovation provided by Central Office personnel?
5. What are the Central Office attitudes towards innovation?

Because the central office is often perceived as an unlikely place to find innovations, these research questions were used to test a null hypothesis: There is no relationship between school-based innovations and Central Office structure, behavior, and

attitudes. Other inferential hypotheses tested the structural and behavioral support interactions among administrative levels at the central office [e.g., cabinet level versus directorate level versus principals] and geographic areas [e.g., central office address versus area and satellite offices].

Method

School District Context

The public school district studied here, the largest in the state, operates over 120 schools. While the system is the oldest in the South, there exists a strong tradition of private and parochial schools in the state. Prior to middle class and white flight from the urban center, public education in this district served at risk populations, even before the term existed. For this reason alone, the district may be an ideal setting for studying innovation as a district organizing concept because the needs of at risk students demand innovation.

Subjects

Two different groups of subjects were used to obtain information about innovative programs operating within the school district. The first group consisted of school principals, who were considered the best source of information about the types of programs currently in use at their schools, and, hence, in the district.

The principals [N=30] were selected by using a non-random sampling procedure based on the research teams' opinions about which principals would be cooperative. Even with careful

selection of the principals, the response rate from the original sample was only 50%. The sample was expanded to include principals outside the original group. In addition, the non-responding members of the original sample were interviewed by telephone in order to obtain a larger group of programs. Using these techniques, the researchers were able to identify 68 innovations identified by principals.

The second group of subjects consisted of high ranking administrators within the school district. In order to assure the broadest possible sampling of the administration, all directors, Associate Superintendents, the Deputy Superintendent and the Superintendent were included in the sample. Of the 36 administrators in the sample population, 30 were successfully interviewed for a response rate of over 80 percent. All of the people interviewed had long histories within the school district, serving as principals or in other administrative capacities. Many of the people interviewed serve on the Superintendent's Leadership Team and his Cabinet which have overlapping memberships. They are regularly involved in the majority of decisions concerning program development and implementation in the district.

Instrumentation

Two different instruments were developed to collect information about innovative efforts in the school district. The first instrument, "Program Innovation Study" is a survey on which the principal identifies innovative programs operating in that

school. After each innovation, the principal answered the following questions: (1) Which central office departments knew of the existence of the program; (2) which departments support the program; and (3) how would the principal rate the level of central office departmental support in terms of effectiveness.

The second instrument, "Central Office Interview Protocol" contained two sections: a structured interview protocol and a survey of innovative programs. In the interview, the researchers asked central office administrators to describe their jobs and the functions of their departments. In order to get some sense of the sociometric relationships (Scott, 1978) between individuals and departments within central office, administrators were asked to identify the other departments with whom they interacted regularly. Similarly, administrators were asked to discuss their interactions with the schools. The selected administrators were also asked to discuss their concept of innovative educational programs. As a final part of the interview, the administrators were asked to identify innovative programs with which their departments were involved. The average time for each interview was 30 minutes, with some lasting the minimum time span of 20 minutes, while others continued for an hour. All of the researchers took notes during the interviews which were transcribed into verbatim summaries.

The second part of the "Central Office Interview Protocol" was a survey developed from the results of the original principal survey. The central administrators were asked to indicate their

degree of involvement in the programs that the principals had named. The intent of the survey was to determine both the involvement and the knowledge of central office personnel about programs that were in existence in the schools. It also provided administrators with the names of programs that they may have neglected to mention in the interview phase.

Limitations of the Study

The definitions of innovations given by principals and central office personnel were difficult to interpret. Many new ideas and new ways of doing things are instituted informally and are not always referred to as innovations. In many instances, these new arrangements are not even given names. Thus, it is far easier for a school administrator to list a program by name than to describe any new or modified efforts and objectives being tried among teachers or schools. Moreover, a program in one context may be labelled an innovation, while, in another instance, the same effort is viewed as "nothing special" - depending upon personal and political characteristics of the individuals and programs involved. The responses, therefore, vary from school to school and from individual to individual.

Another limitation concerns the degree of trust within an organization. In districts with strained relationships, it is the feeling of school level administrators that the less the Central Office knows, the better. "We tell them only what we have to; what is required by law, policy, and practice," admitted one principal. In such climates, politics play a role in

defining and supporting innovations.

Lastly, financial status also plays a role in understanding and enabling innovation. If a district is operating with limited funds that continue shrinking, what kind of leadership is required to keep top administration from consciously or unconsciously assuming a protectionist point of view? Is it reasonable to expect innovative responses from beleaguered administrators?

Quantitative Results: Principals and Central Office Survey Responses

This study examined the nature of program innovation at the school level, the support provided for school level innovation by central office personnel, and the perception of the effectiveness of that support by principals. A survey of principals revealed more than 60 different innovative programs were operating in the school district. The data indicate that while most of the innovations have external sources [e.g., Chapter 1],, there are still many innovations spawned by people at the school level.

The involvement of Central Office in school level involvement is a more complicated issue. In this study, principals readily named central office departments that either knew about or supported their programs. According to the principals, the Area Offices and the Division of Educational Programs know more about what is happening at the school level. Moreover, the principals indicated high levels of support from their immediate supervisors, particularly Area Superintendents.

The principals' perceived the other central administrative offices as detached and busy with other matters. The responses of the principals were summarized by organizational division and presented in Table 1. The principals also identified the central office departments that supported their innovative programs. "High" ratings were given to both the Area Superintendents and the Division of Educational Programs. These results are summarized in Table 2.

There was much less clarity about the effectiveness of that support. Other than the Principals' immediate supervisors, Central Office was not seen as very effective in supporting school level innovation. Whereas both the Area Offices and Division of Educational Programs received "high" ratings in terms of support, only the former was rated as effective. When central office personnel were asked to indicate the level of their involvement with the programs that the principals named, the responses indicated a lack of involvement (Table 3). Over 46 percent of the central office responses indicated either no knowledge of the program or no involvement with the program.

Table 1 Who in Central Office knows about your innovative programs?	
Division or Department Named	**Number of Programs**
Area Superintendent	35
Educational Programs	36
Chapter I	3
Information Systems	1
Personnel	1
School Board	2
State Department of Education	1
Central Office	8
None	6
All	2

Table 2
What is the effectiveness of Central Office support for innovative programs?

Division or Department Named	Effectiveness 1 (low) to 5 (high)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Area Superintendent	0	0	3	3	13
Educational Programs	2	4	3	5	4
Chapter I	0	0	0	1	2
Information Systems	0	0	1	0	0
Personnel	0	0	0	1	0
School Board	0	0	0	0	1
State Department of Education	0	0	0	1	0
Central Office	0	2	0	0	0
None	2	5	0	2	0
All	0	0	1	0	0

Table 3 Central Office Involvement in Innovative Programs		
Level of Involvement	**Number of Responses**	**Percentage of Responses**
No Knowledge of program	302	21.6%
Minimal involvement	161	11.5%
Involved as needed	125	8.9%
Occasional involvement	171	12.2%
Frequent involvement	123	8.8%
Extensive involvement	167	11.9%
Not involved	352	25.1%

Two inferential statistical analyses were performed on the data in order to better understand the relationship between Central Office and school level program innovation (Tables 4 and 5). The first analysis divided the responding central office personnel into two groups based on whether or not they were members of the Superintendent's Cabinet. The Cabinet is the highest administrative decision making body in the school district. The members are selected by the Superintendent and serve to review most decisions made within the district. The members are mostly Associate Superintendents or above. Some directors are also included. The data were analyzed using an independent t-test and are presented in the Table 4 below.

Table 4

Summary of t-test of Cabinet vs. non-Cabinet Members in Level of Involvement in School Based Program Innovations

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Cabinet	2.52	1.93	
			3.59*
Not Cabinet	3.10	2.09	

*p < 0.055

There was a statistically significant difference between the level of involvement of the cabinet and the non-cabinet members in school based program innovations. Non-cabinet members were found to be more knowledgeable and more involved in innovative programs.

In the second inferential analysis, the responding central office administrators were divided by their work locations. There were three work locations: Main Office [MO], Instructional Support Office [ISO], and Support Services Office [SSO]. The Main Office housed the highest levels of the administrative personnel and all business functions. All but one of the Associate Superintendents were housed in the ISO. These Associate Superintendents are responsible for the direct supervision of the principals. The SSO contains personnel who are responsible for maintenance, transportation, media resources, etc. The data were analyzed by a Oneway Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results

of the analysis are presented in the Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of ANOVA of Level of Involvement in School Based Program Innovations by Work Location

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	39.31	2	19.65	4.72*
Within Groups	2993.01	718	4.17	
Total	3032.32	720		

*$p < 0.05$

There was a statistically significant difference between the level of involvement in school based program innovation associated with the work location of the responding central office administrators. A post hoc Scheffe procedure was used to see which groups were truly different from each other. The Scheffe procedure revealed that Main Office [MO] was statistically significantly different from Instructional Support Office [ISO]. There was no difference between the MO and the SSO or between SSO and the ISO. Based on this analysis, central office personnel who work in the area offices or in curriculum were found to be more knowledgeable and more involved in school based program innovation. On the bases of the quantitative data, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the

central office personnel and school-based innovations should be rejected.

Qualitative Results: Central Office Interview Data

The data in this section were compiled from the 30 interviews of Central Office respondents at the highest line and staff levels. It was clearly evident that the amount of work responsibilities assigned to Central Office administrators was of real concern to them. Although all of the Central Office administrators interviewed had previous experience and expertise in at least one or more of their current duties, the continual adding on of duties and responsibilities made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to be knowledgeable and competent in every one of the expanded, assigned areas.

Concerning Central Office job responsibilities, the words they used to describe what they do are illustrative of the culture, behaviors, and attitudes of the central office. Only once in any of the 30 interviews was the word "leadership" mentioned as part of a job description. No one spoke of consulting with schools. Instead, the action verbs most frequently used to express central office roles and task behaviors were: coordinate, facilitate, administer, work closely with, oversee, assist, support, liaison, plan, encourage, and manage. Two descriptive phrases captured the tone of all of the interviews: (a) keep the system moving and (b) monitor state mandates.

Sociometric questions ask who talks to whom about what.

Central office personnel talk with other central office personnel more than with anyone else. Communications deliberately follow formal line and staff status. Everyone talks regularly [i.e., from daily to weekly] with their superordinates. Although the number of external contacts [e.g., funding agencies, business leaders] is limited, central office personnel are often responsible for numerous school-based personnel. For example, Area Superintendents are responsible for approximately 40 schools; Chapter One is responsible for monitoring programs in over 100 schools [with 13 coordinators]; Social Services are responsible for 77 social workers in the schools; Guidance and Counseling is responsible for 114 guidance counselors in the schools; the Director of Transportation has over 150 school bus drivers; and only three Curriculum and Instruction Directors divide up the entire school district. From the perspective of the Central Office administrators, the communication network reached down into the schools.

The content of Central office communications with school-based personnel seems to follow three embedded patterns: <u>ad hoc</u> problem complaints, the clarification of rules, and personnel relationships. Acting as a resource mostly to principals, quotes from central office support these patterns: "I get contacted when services are not delivered;" "I really only deal with friends who are principals and they call me with a problem that I can help with." Teachers were rarely mentioned except in terms of problems they, too, generate or in the context of program

implementation. The most limited of all communications, however, is with parents. These interactions seem to be limited to planning for new buildings and attendance boundaries. Of course, Central Office personnel are expected to address parent phone calls and inquires "to assist in problem solving and to interpret policy." A characteristic Central Office stance is, "I interpret policy to parents and community. I assist parents in resolving problems at the individual school."

The third area addressed by the interview centered around the definition of innovations and its implementation processes. Whereas principals in this study chose to report the names of innovations [primarily related to curriculum and instruction] rather than to describe innovative social and managerial efforts, the Central Office personnel defined innovative educational programs relating process to outcomes. The phrases most frequently used by Central Office personnel to define innovations included: has promise of success, unique and different, basically a risk-taking venture, focused on a particular need that is not being satisfied, a modern technique, above and beyond the regular norm. No one offered any technical or theoretical models of innovations or of implementation procedures. Moreover, the language of strategic planning was totally absent. Ironically, Miles (1964) cites the same lack of analytical thinking on the part of practitioners about innovations and implementation processes as a primary reason for writing his book.

Contradictory statements concerning the implementation of

innovations seemed to reflect individual perspectives within the Central Office. One example of a bottom up response was, "Here's something I'm knowledgeable about and I want you to take a look at it to see if it suits your needs." Other statements reflected a more top down point of view: "We have written the curriculum of this school system. The state outlines its goals and objectives and special skills and we do the rest." Many of the Central Office administrators realize that their modus operandi is not conducive to change, and their statements reflected an awareness of being trapped. "There is a tremendous need for more interaction with teachers, but we haven't found the structure to achieve that." While Central Office personnel talk about providing for "the needs of the learners," they do not necessarily know how to achieve this. As a result, their conception of innovation does not reflect a strong individual position [i.e., outside the district's stance] except to maintain that the Central Office must have a role. Their words search for an acceptable middle ground between the Central Office and the school-level about where and how innovation takes place. That middle ground was voiced again and again: "There doesn't have to be a difference;" "it doesn't matter," and "it is "basically the same." They described the optimum process with words such as collaboration and marriage. At best, Central Office personnel acknowledged that "some [innovative] things lend themselves to Central Office while some things lend themselves to schools."

Paradoxically, when describing program innovation associated

with their own departments, they described behaviors and programs that were imposed on the schools from above, without seeing inconsistencies. "We look at the statistics [i.e., test scores, attendance, etc.] to determine what areas need improvement;" "my job is to keep the system moving;" and, "my job is to see that we obey state mandates." Yet, from experience they acknowledged that it was "more difficult to implement when it comes from the top-down."

Discussion and Conclusions

The extant literatures on central office and school innovations did not yield any generalizable empirical evidence on the topic of central office sociometric interactions. Previous studies have focused on one organizational aspect, such as staff development, and then offer implications about other organizational sectors. Case studies emphasize a single system concept and tend to factor out individual and level differences within the organization by function, role, and department. Finally, other than Gittell and Hollander (1968), there are only "pieced together" data on the effects of central office behaviors on innovations (Wimpelberg, 1987).

A discussion of the conclusions is presented here in terms of the five research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the definition of educational program innovation? Two sources of data were used to define educational program innovation. School principals limited their survey responses to specific curricular and instructional

programs, most of which have identifiable names attached to them. In all cases, social and managerial changes were ignored. On the other hand, Central Office personnel identified in their interviews the broad objectives of educational program innovation in common, non-technical words. Their definitions tended to be based on common sense reasoning and were expressed rudimentarily. The absence of model-thinking may imply (a) the lack of clarity, vision, or leadership support for innovation, or (b) a poor understanding of how change takes place in large institutions. It may also indicate that there is no common understanding of innovation and few incentives to innovate.

Whatever the reason, the concept of innovations operates on multiple levels. For most educators, there is an unclear, abstract definition of the term which centers around trying new and creative ways to achieve success; and, the meaning of innovations is inextricably tied to specific programs. The program **is** the innovation, or more accurately, the name of the program is the innovation. These programs are widely known throughout the system and used synonymously with innovation.

Research Question 2: What are the sources of innovation?

There is no evidence that innovations are cumulative. The number of innovations seems to be confused with actual innovations. Innovation as conceived theoretically is a qualitative aspect [i.e. new, better, unique, and creative]. The factors that contribute to increasing the number of innovations are different from those factors that lead to qualitative,

system-wide improvement. In the former instance, there are legislative mandates, external funding agencies, and encumbered budget lines. The proliferation of innovative programs serves to dilute the unity of purpose or vision of the organization (Drucker, 1985; Williams, 1991). This is as true for Central Office-school relations as it is for federal and state innovations (Timar & Kirp, 1988).

When programs are tied to current trends and external funding as we found in this district, expertise must come literally overnight as funding agencies typically offer grants to urban districts on short-term schedules. Thus the district swings from one objective to another depending on who offers money for which district need. Educational systems do not function well given these fits and starts. Moreover, innovation is unlikely to be successful if it is based on the needs established by funding sources as opposed to the real needs of schools and their particular students. Externally funded programs have limited budget lines, after which local school districts are expected to absorb the costs. The fiscal realities of urban school districts is that this usually does not happen no matter how innovative or worthwhile the external program may have been. After a number of these discontinuous cycles, enthusiasm for new programs erodes into an attitude of cynicism that infects the climate for innovation, particularly at the school level.

The heavy reliance on outside or soft money as the source of innovative programs also may be associated with the annual need

to downsize. It certainly affects Central Office and school attitudes toward risk taking. The annual ritual of eliminating staff and programs establishes a mindset inconsistent with the trial and error necessary for innovations.

Research Question 3: What is the structural support for innovation provided by Central Office personnel?

Clearly evident from this study is that both Central Office personnel and school principals speak and think of the Central Office as a bureaucracy, when in fact the structures of this Central Office have long since ceased to function as a true bureaucracy. Many of the tenets of formal bureaucratic structure no longer exist [e.g., division of labor, unity of direction, expertise, span of control, and uniformity], although bureaucratic thinking persists. In this district, bureaucracy was more a state of mind than a structural reality.

One of the bureaucratic tenets is that the division of labor and the exercise of power are based on expertise. Our findings indicate that the increasing span of control under line positions dilutes expertise. The problem of shrinking budgets over the past five years has had a major impact at both the Director and Associate Superintendent levels in particular. These offices now carry a much larger number of distinct tasks, functions, and duties. Although the concept of span of control has no precise mathematical definition (Applewhite, 1965), the total number of tasks and duties under these positions was out of control. No individual can work effectively given the large number of

responsibilities placed in his/her hands. Moreover, it is unlikely that school-site personnel have a clear picture of what Central Office personnel really do (Stevenson, 1990). This overload of responsibilities becomes an issue of productivity when (a) the added tasks are **outside** the individual's area of expertise, and when (b) the number of tasks grows beyond anyone's capacity to devote adequate time to do them well. Both conditions were clearly evident from this study.

When the number of central office positions supported by general funds were separated from those supported by external "soft" monies, the resultant organization was quite flat. Nevertheless, the language, thinking, and behaviors exhibited by the central office staff was as if the structure were still bureaucratic. Central Office administrators often described the interorganizational relationships in such bureaucratic terms as hierarchy, chain of command, and line and staff positions. Considering the breadth of research reports and reform activities which clearly indicate the dysfunctional aspects of bureaucratic Central Office structure and policies, it is surprising and instructive that the language of bureaucracy was so widely and openly used by Central Office personnel. Given the level of irrationality which makes up both job responsibilities and the current structure, bureaucratic thinking and language may offer Central Office personnel a rational and reassuring work environment model. What this means is that although bureaucratic structure may be eroding, the comfort and safety of being an

Organization Man is still evident in educational Central Offices.

Research Question 4: What is the behavioral support of innovation provided by Central Office personnel?

The self-reported responses of Central Office personnel portray a worklife of large amounts of work, some of which is routine, even mundane, but nevertheless required. In addition, they spoke of educational work that is complex and competes with the mandated and mundane. A conclusion drawn from the interviews suggest that when time forces a choice between complex and mundane, the latter will be chosen. Mandated responsibilities simply cannot be ignored.

Ironically, the number of mandated tasks performed by a Central Office administrator may interfere with innovation while serving as a buffer against further budget cuts. That is, there is less chance that a position/department will be eliminated if it is responsible for mandated responsibilities. Such a threatening fiscal climate may in and of itself mitigate against Central Office innovation.

Interorganizational communications closely followed line and staff distinctions, whereby individuals on a particular level interacted primarily with others at the same level. That is, Associate Superintendents spoke with other Associate Superintendents, Directors with Directors, Associate Directors with Associate Directors. The Superintendent spoke mostly with the Deputy Superintendent, his Administrative Assistant, his secretary and members of his Cabinet. Across organizational

division, the most frequent and most effective communications seemed to be between line supervisors and line supervisees.

The data suggest that Central Office communications are almost entirely internal. Most central office personnel acknowledge limited communication with colleagues outside of their immediate work assignments. This sets up a closed system network of communications that also affects the climate needed for innovation. Given the time that must be devoted to completing work assignments and the limited amount of contact with school-based colleagues, external ideas flowing into the system are limited.

Research Question 5: What are the Central Office attitudes toward innovation?

At the highest levels of the organization, innovation is not a central priority or expressed concern. Rather, the priority is to keep things running as smoothly as possible and the ability to keep disaster at bay. According to Central Office interviews, their school-site communications are invariably with principals concerning problems and complaints. One of the most candid statements made by a Central Office administrator was: "Frankly, I don't see much creativity coming from the Central Office."

The words used most often to describe Central Office functions were coordination and support services. What do these broad terms connote as performance indicators and measures? Clearly, these terms permit the assigning of double-digit duties to Central Office personnel without great expectations of

accountability. More pointedly, what do the terms coordination and support services hide? Is there evidence that these functions improve school performance, enabling the school staff to innovate? In contrast, action verbs such as consulting or negotiating, which connote a more equitable, collegial status, were never mentioned. The demand side of innovation did not appear as operating in the district except for some starlet business programs, upcoming school board elections, and parental protests over budget cuts for nationally-recognized programs.

Central Office leadership in this district seems to be based primarily on permitting others to exercise leadership. Thus, Area Superintendents are permitted to articulate independent directions for their area schools ranging from school-based management to programs supporting academic excellence to programs supporting community equity issues. The district as a whole lacks a clear, single vision, and thus in terms of supporting district-wide innovation, this neutral definition of leadership seems to be inadequate. Not only is it perceived as a lack of direction, but it also appears to hinder risk-taking activities within the Central Office and at schools. There were no rewards for attempting innovations within the system, which may explain why many principals preferred not to respond to the survey or limited their responses to only known-named programs, rather than discuss exciting within-school efforts. If innovations require a climate that tolerates controversy and conflict as well as methods of successful resolution, such characteristics were found

to be absent in the district's top leadership. While many innovative programs exist, and many talented innovators survive, the overall climate for risks necessary for system-wide innovation is unnurturing.

In conclusion, there was little evidence, either structurally or behaviorally, that the school system has a clear understanding of what innovation is, the complexity of implementation processes, or its role in improving the delivery of student services. Further, there was little commitment to innovation and risk-taking, to rewards, and for utilizing research and development. Regarding school-based innovations, Central Office encouragement of innovations is limited to informal relationships among individuals, rather than formal, structural relationships. In some instances, Central Office administrators choose which schools are to receive an innovative program funded by a grant; in other instances, schools develop their own responses to problems with or without the knowledge, support or encouragement of the Central Office. If innovation is an indicator of the relationship between Central Office and schools as a key to enabling change, this school system is an unlikely candidate for change and restructuring with its current leadership.

Linking Central Office with School-Site Innovations:

A Proposed Model

The Central Office role in innovation has been equivocal: sometimes obstructive, at other times supportive, but mostly, it

is neutral (Davidson, 1992). The purpose for suggesting a model is to demonstrate that a systematic investigation of a Central Office can provide policy makers with empirical evidence for use in improving administrative practice. The four components in the model, leadership, expertise, external demand, and innovative timeframes, reflect gaps found within the central administration studied here. Based on other studies of other central administrations, the components may differ. Hence, the model is presented with two clear limitations: first, it is based on data from one specific urban school system and because no two systems are exactly alike, the specific recommendations must differ for each context; second, Central Offices have a limited role to play in school-level innovation. Decisions made at one level do not necessarily lead to action at another level. Educational innovation is more complex and comprehensive than can be described in any one study based on only one organizational level. Nevertheless, the lack of research on Central Offices suggests that the design, findings, and model may be helpful in other large, urban settings and for further research efforts.

Leadership: Central Office leadership is needed first to establish the district's commitment to innovation and second to establish policies designed to reinforce that commitment. That commitment is built on the foundation that education is an on-going process, with no guarantees that any one effort will succeed, but that over time, innovative experimentation will result in success.

Leadership is needed to give direction and strength to others who are directly involved in providing services to personnel and children. Part of that direction is an explicit message that not all new programs need to be adopted. We found that the absence of leadership leads to the proliferation of innovative programs which are not consistent with school-level missions or overall district policy. A clear distinction needs to be made between new programs and innovations. The former runs helter skelter throughout the system coming and going with whatever new legislative directive or external funding source dictates. These result in no real change. Leadership requires the courage to say no to large sums of encumbered money. Leadership requires the strength to reject a worthy foundation's latest funding offer that does not fit with the direction and needs of the entire system.

Expertise: Overextending duties for all Central Office administrators results in diminished expertise and the lack of accountability. As one Central Office administrator noted, "You must define the job before it defines you." In their classical study of power, French and Raven (1959) point out that "There is some evidence that the attempted exertion of expert power outside of the range of expert power will reduce expert power. An undermining of confidence seems to take place." Leadership is needed to free individuals from the multiplicity of their tasks in order to reaffirm their expert power. In so doing, however, it is critical that we do not simply transfer the dysfunction of

duty overload onto school-based personnel.

Clear areas of expertise and division of labor would help schools to know whom to contact. In this district, the informal grapevine and personal relationships, more than fairness or equity, influenced Central Office and school-level communications. There are distinct advantages and disadvantages built into the informal networks which lead to discretionary decisions and institutionalized inequities throughout the system. In order to return to expertise as a basis of power, the decks must be cleared, job descriptions need to be rewritten down to the essentials.

External Demand: Sociometric data indicated that Central Office personnel operate within a closed system tied to line and staff positions. As a result, innovative thinking is severely limited to a narrow group of individuals and the resources they might seek. Given the amount of responsibilities for Central Office administrators and their degree of **busyness**, not much time is allotted for either researching or soliciting new, external ideas.

The lack of time is not the only barrier to external communications. School-based innovations require a reorientation of values on the part of Central Office personnel. This means broadening horizontally the base of decisional participation to include principals, teachers, parents, community, and business constituents. It means deliberately changing perceptions and embedded patterns of communication with these groups moving from

problems and complaints to planning and implementing improvements.

Innovative Time Frames: Kouzes and Posner (1991) advocate that innovation occurs along a timeline among people who have been working together for a maximum of five years. Whereas the current tenure of superintendents falls within that timeline, other Central Office administrators often maintain a longer tenure in office. Their experience gives them invaluable expertise to support innovations. Their protected tenure permits them to extend this support to nurturing meaningful change.

REFERENCES

Applewhite, P. (1965). Organizational behavior. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Caldwell, D. S. & Wood, F. H., (1988). School based improvement: Are we ready? Educational Leadership, 46(2), 50-53.

Casner-Lotto, J. (1988). Expanding the teacher's role: Hammond's school improvement. Phi Delta Kappan, 69(5), 349-353.

Cistone, P., & Ianaccone, L. (1980). Educational governance: Contradictions and tendencies. Education and Urban Society, 12(4). 407-420.

Coyle, L., & Wythcher, A. (1992). Transforming the idea into action: Policies and practices to enhance school effectiveness. Urban Education, 26(4), 390-399.

David, J. L. (1989). Synthesis of research on school based management. Educational leadership, 46(8), 45-53.

Davidson, B. (1992). Building school capacity to accelerate learning: A study of the restructuring of four elementary schools. Unpublished dissertation. University of New Orleans.

DeVries, R., & Colbert, J. (1990). The Los Angeles experience: Individually oriented staff development. In B. Joyce (Ed.). Changing school culture through staff development, (1990 yearbook). Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dillion-Peterson, B. (1990). The Lincoln experience: Development of an ecosystem. In B. Joyce (Ed.). Changing school culture through staff development, (1990 yearbook). Alexandria. Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dreyfuss, G.O., Cistone, P. & Ellis, W. (1992). Restructuring in a large district: Dade County, Florida. In C. Glickman (Ed.). Supervision and training. Alexandria Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Drucker, P., (1985). Innovation and entrepreneurship. New York: Harper & Row.

French, J. R. & Raven, B. (1978). The basis of social power. In W. Natemeyer (Ed.). Classics of Organizational Behavior. Oak Park, Il.: Moore Publishing Co.

Fullan, M. (1982). The meaning of educational change. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gittell, M. (1967). Participants and participation. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Gittell, M., & Hollander, T. (1968) Six urban school districts: Model for analyzing change. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Goodlad, J. I. (1978). Educational leadership toward the third era. Educational Leadership,35, 322-331.

Herman, J. L. (1990). School based management. Instructional Leader, 3(4), 1-5.

Johnson, B. (1985). Organizational structure and idealogy in schooling. Educational Theory, 35(4), 333-344.

Kouzes, J. & Posner, B. (1987). The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Meyer, J. (1983). Organizational factors affecting legalization in education. In J. Meyer & W. R. Scott (Eds.). Organizational environments: Ritual and rationality. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 217-232.

Miles, M. (1964). Innovation and education. New York: Teachers College Press.

Mort, P. (1964). Studies in educational innovation from the Institute of Administrative Research. In M. Miles (Ed.). Innovation and education. Chapter 13. New York: Teachers College Press.

National Association of Secondary School Principals. (1989). School site management. The Practitioner, 16(2), 1-6

Pajak, E. & Glickman, C. (1989). Dimensions of school district improvement. Educational Leadership, 46(8), 390-394.

Peterson. P. (1978). School politics Chicago style. University of Chicago Press.

Rodgers, D. (1969). 110 Livingston Street. New York: Vantage.

Rosenholtz, S. (1989) Teacher's workplace: The social organization of school. New York: Longman, Inc.

Rowan, B. (1982). Instructional management in historic perspective: Evidence on differentiation in school districts. Educational Administration Quarterly, 18(1), 43-55.

Scott, W. (1978). Organizational theory: An overview and an appraisal. In J. Shafritz & P. Whitbeck (Eds.). Classics of organizational theory. Oak Park, Il. Moore Publishing.

Sickler, J. L. (1988). Teachers in charge: Empowering the professionals. Phi Delta Kappan, 69(5), 354-376.

Smith, C. & Tannenbaum, A. (1963). Organizational control structure: A comparative analysis. Human Relations, 16(4), 299-316.

Stevenson, B. (1991) Principal's assessment of the delivery of selected instructional support services. Unpublished dissertation. University of Virginia.

Taylor, D. & Bogotch, I. (1992). Teacher decisional participation: Rhetoric or reality. Paper presented at the Southwest Educational Research Association, Houston, Tx.

Timar, T. & Kirp, D. (1988). Managing educational excellence. New York: Falmer Press

Tye, K. & Novotney, J. (1968). Schools in transition: The practitioner as change agent. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Van Meter, E. J. (1991). The Kentucky mandate: School based decision making. National Association of Secondary Schools Bulletin, 75(532), 52-62.

Wallace, R., LeMahieu, P. & Bickel, W. (1990). The Pittsburgh experience: Achieving commitment to comprehensive staff development. In B. Joyce (Ed.). Changing school culture through staff development (1990 yearbook). Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Weick, K., (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. Administrative Science Quarterly, 21(1), 1-19.

Wimpelberg, R. K., (1987) The dilemma of instructional leadership and a central role for the central office. In W. Greenfield (Ed.). Instructional leadership concepts, issues, and controversies. (pp. 100-117). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Wimpelberg, R. K. (1988). Instructional leadership and ignorance-Guidelines for the new studies of district administrators. Education and Urban Society, 20(3), 302-309.